DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 822 HE 033 952

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TITLE African American College Students' Motivation in Education.

PUB DATE 2001-04-00

NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Black Students; *College Students; Higher Education; Interviews; *Majors (Students); Student Attitudes; *Student Motivation; Values

IDENTIFIERS African Americans

ABSTRACT

Possible motivational factors related to the choice of college major and educational values were studied for 60 African American students. An interview guide was developed with open-ended questions designed to generate narrative about students' thoughts and perceptions of education. Students were asked why they chose their majors, what education meant to them, what it meant to be a good student, and why they studied. Findings indicate that these students tended to address various types of motivation and multiple goals related to their career decisions, educational values, and reasons for studying. The intentions and goals of these students were associated with a combination of intrinsic, extrinsic, personal, and social needs, and future goal orientations. Most of these students cited self-fulfillment as a motivator. With regard to career decision making, students seemed to concentrate on enjoyment and empathy factors, with personal enjoyment considered the most influential determinant in decision making about academic majors. Results of the study also indicate that highly intrinsically motivated students can also be involved in extrinsic, social, and future orientations. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

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A paper presented at the meeting of the

American Educational Research Association

Seattle, Washington

April, 2001

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African American College Student s' Motivation in Education

Purposes and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the study was to examine 60 African American college students' possible motivational factors related to their college major decision and their educational values.

A great amount of research on motivation and learning has delineated cog...ve engagement or academic achievement primarily associated with intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Meece & Molt, 1993; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Generally, intrinsic motivation stems from internal, personal factors such interests, and enjoyment or curiosity, whereas extrinsic motivation is directed by observable external factors such as rewards, punishment, or peer/ parents pressures (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

A collective of past findings has shown that students who are primarily intrinsically motivated persist longer, tend to seek out and conquer more challenges, and show deeper in their knowledge and higher in their academic outcomes than those who are extrinsically motivated (Ames, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Nicholls, 1984; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991). Furthermore, researchers believe that extrinsic motivation such as rewards decrease students' intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975; Dweck, 1986).

However, recent research has attempted to understand the relationship between learners and academic achievements from multidimensional motivation aspects. Research has suggested that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not mutually exclusive but may coexist related to various motivational determinants (Husman & Lens, 1999; McInerney & McInerney, 1996; Van

Etten, 1997). Academic learning activities are complex tasks that may require students to have varied reasons or goals for studying (Husman & Lens, 1999). Learning behaviors or academic achievement may be influenced by a complex array of various motivational modes.

As we shift into a new millennium, it is apparent that by the turn of the century more than one third of the USA's population is expected to be ethnic minorities (Lee, 1998). These demographic changes create a need for educators and researchers to understand the thoughts and perceptions of this growing minority in the United States and to find appropriate ways to meet their needs.

A variety of theoretical perspectives on motivation and learning have provided researchers and educators promises for positive future educational outcomes. However, compared to the numerous studies on motivation and learning, there has been little research on African American college students' motivation. Therefore, our understanding of African American regarding learning and motivation is still largely based on majority of limited studies. To truly understand what it means to become a motivated learner, our understanding must traverse a wider range of African American college students' thought and perceptions.

As a first step, this study examined 60 African American college students' potential motivational modes and investigated pathways among the potential motivational factors affecting their college major decision making and educational values.

Method

Participant. Sixty students (21 males, 37 females, and 2 missing with mean age = 26.22, *SD* = 7.63 years) who identified themselves as Black or African American were randomly selected from a list of African American university students provided by the University's registrar. The

participants were contacted by telephone and interviewed during scheduled personal appointments. These students were attending a University located in the Southern United States. A brief summary of the nature of the study was provided to these students and personal interview appointments were scheduled. During the presentation of the results the researchers used aliases to protect the participants' anonymity.

The Semi-Structured Interviews. The interview guide consists of open-ended questions designed to generate narrative about thought and perception of education.

This study is a part of African American students' motivation projects. Only the following four open-ended questions were included in this study: (a) What is your major? Why did you choose your major?; (b) What does education mean to you?; (c) What does it mean to be a good student to you? ; and (d) Why do you study? After completion of each interview, each participant was asked to fill out a demographic survey. Analysis was completed when all responses were categorized and agreement was reached by researchers.

Data Analysis. The four questions of responses were analyzed separately, yet in a similar manner, using content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to discern themes. A random sample of 15 responses for each of the four research questions were utilized to establish indigenous codes/themes for each question analyzed. Three researchers developed a coding system and any disagreements were resolved through discussion. A total of 180 submissions per question were analyzed for content and meaning. Indigenous themes were later converted to sensitizing codes/themes. All submissions were analyzed and coded independently by three researchers. Overall, inter-rater reliability coefficient of .91 was obtained. The inter-rater reliability coefficients for question A, B, C, and D are .920, .933, .820, and .953 respectively.

Analysis was completed when agreement was reached by three investigators. The specific results for each of the four questions are described below along with the primary themes that are associated with each question.

Results

What is your major? & Why did you choose your major? Analysis of students' motivation on their major choice yielded the following three themes: enjoyment-orientation (58.4% of responses), empathy (15%), and combination of enjoyment and empathy-orientation (26.7%).

Enjoyment for or interested in their major subject or area is the most frequent category of responses regarding the students' major decision. Most of the students indicated intrinsic importance when they discussed their choice of major. For instance, a student whose major is Kinesiology, said, "I chose Kinesiology because I enjoy playing all types of sports and I played several sports in high school. Also I believe I chose this major because I love beings active."

However, 40% of responses in personal enjoyment were also provided with extrinsic factors. The students addressed that they chose their major based upon not only intrinsic interests but also other factors such as money or the prospect of better life in the future.

About 15% of the total participants attributed empathy to their major choice. Empathy category included willing to devote or sacrifice their life and time for changing others's life or improving better society. The students believed that it is very important for them to contribute to someone's life. For instance, Anice, whose major is Elementary Education, said, "I felt there was a lot of children in need of a person that would take the time to listen, to understand, and to care about them. I wanted to be the person that would make that difference. I believe that the Lord will truly bless me if I just take out a little time and see about his precious children. I want to

make an impact on someone's life so that in turn they will do the same thing for others." Just like Anice, the students expressed their awareness of positive influences on society (".....I am also interested in the growing population of black athletes in high School.").

What does education mean to you? The following three themes were developed centering upon the students' perceptions of education: (a) opportunity (48.3% of the participants), (b) self-fulfilment (43.3%), and money (5%).

Approximately 48% of responses considered education as an opportunity for getting a good job, success, or better life in the future. For example, Eric, whose major is Chemistry education, said, "Education is the key to life and making it in the world today. Without an education even with a high school education it is hard to get a job. You need a high school education and some college to make it today in our society." Some students also mentioned extrinsic educational value related to the combination of an opportunity, self-esteem, helping others ("Education to me is an opening to many doors. I will be able to be in positions that will allow me to help others. Education will help boost my self-esteem. It will make me fell better about myself. Education is knowledge and knowledge leads to success. Having an education tells others that you are willing to make a sacrifice to obtain what you want to help train others. Education is a whole new world opening up for you").

About 43% of responses assigned self-fulfilment to their value of education such as learning new things, reaching a goal, or applying knowledge. For example, one student whose major is Kinesiology said, "Education means to me is teaching a child or adult knowledge and wisdom to help them understand subjects, not just pertaining to school, but to real life and learn how to apply. Also, it is inspiring people that they can achieve anything they desire, but they must

not give up when the struggle comes."

Compared to the number of responses on opportunity and self-fulfilment categories, only 5% of responses referred to money as their educational value.

What does mean to bing a good student? The following five themes were developed centering upon the students' perceptions of being a good student: (a) Moral (22% of the participants), (b) Knowledge (9%), (c) effort (17%), (d) collegiality (4%), and (e) prospective life or good grade (7%).

About 22% of responses assigned Moral to their value of being a good students. Moral category included the following themes: Being responsible, respectful, on time, or kind, and following the rules, discipline ("A good student respect himself, the instructor, and their peers. They come to class daily, participate in discussions and activities, ask questions when necessary, listen carefully, take good notes, and do not disturb the class or other students").

Approximately 17% of responses emphasized on the role of effort to be a good student ("A good student will work hard on his or her studies and will always be prepared for class").

About 9% of responses assigned knowledge to one of components of being a good student. Mastering academic performance, applying knowledge into everyday life, or interesting in cognitive growth ("A good student to me is one that applies himself and uses all of his talents").

About 7% of responses believed that a good student should take care of their grade and future ("A good student is one who cares about his or her grade in a certain class").

A few students (4%) mentioned collegiality as a important element to be a good student. Collegiality category included such as willing to help others ("Cooperate with instructors and peers..willing to help peers," "Someone who collaborates with other student").

Why do you study? There were two themes centering around the students' reasons for studying: (a) concerning positive outcomes (55% of the participants) and (b) concerning learning itself (43.3%).

Wanting to learn, and getting a good grade are the most common motivational factors for studying. Nearly half (43%) of the participants attributed their reasons for studying to wanting to learn or interest in learning. Their goals for learning seem to be mastery or task-oriented, showing to be related to learning itself. For instance, a student, whose major is Computer Science, said, "because I really want to know about computers from A to Z. I want to be a professional about computers so I want to study. But it's very tough to study about math or history or curricular science."

Getting a good grades or preparing future is also one of the most frequent responses centering upon the reasons for studying. About half (55%) of the participants addressed that they study for getting a good grade or better preparation for the class or their future career. For example, a student attributed his reasons for studying "so that I can be prepared. You can not do your best if you are not prepared. The only way you can keep up on things is to study. When you study, you can apply knowledge you learn with the notes you have and you will make good grades. Good study habits promote good grades and high self-esteem" Interesting, many students mentioned combination of various motivational factors on study. They described one category in terms of the other, suggesting that, at the least, they tend to describe two or three categories as being intimately connected. Regarding the good grade category, students were provided along with other categories such as wanting to learn, for the future, self-esteem, and meeting up to parent's expectations.

From such responses, it appears that the students were motivated to study not only for enjoying learning itself but also for a good grade, the future, or other reasons. More than one motivational factors seem to interact mutually to each other and to inspire the students to study.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate that 60 African American students tend to address various types of motivation and multiple goals related to their career decisions, educational values, and reasons for studying. In contrast to previous studies in learning and motivation (Ames, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Nicholls, 1984; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991), the college students' intentions and goals in this study associated with the combination of intrinsic, extrinsic, personal, social needs, and future goal orientations.

Majority of the African American in this study attributed self-fulfilment such as reaching their dreams, becoming a better person, or acquiring knowledge to their educational goals as well as a successful future life. In a similar way, the responses to the reasons for studying in this study delineate the combination of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation and short-term or long-term goals. Accordingly, the results from this study duplicate and support the findings of current studies in multidimensional motivational modes (Husman & Lens, 1999; McInerney & McInerney, 1996; Van Etten, 1997).

The results of career decision making indicated that the students concentrated on enjoyment and empathy factors. The students in this study addressed that personal enjoyment was the most influential determinant in their decision-making their choices of academic majors. Very few students attributed extrinsic factors such as a good job or a better future life to their main

motivational factors. However, interestingly, the students mentioned their believes about contributing others' life and community growth as a second determinant of their career pursuits. The results of this study suggest that personal intrinsic motivation and the role of society are critical for the 60 African American students' decision-making their choices of academic majors.

Preliminary results indicate the need to expand the scope of motivational theory to help educators better understand African American college students' motivation related to their educational values. Overall, the findings showed that the 60 African American students' motivational modes related to educational values, reasons for studying, and career decision making were complex. The results of this study imply that highly intrinsically motivated students can be at the same time also highly involved in extrinsic, social, and future orientations. Positive educational activities may be not absorbed solely by intrinsic motivation. Rather, students may orchestrate and integrate all sources of motivational factors to optimize their goals.

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